

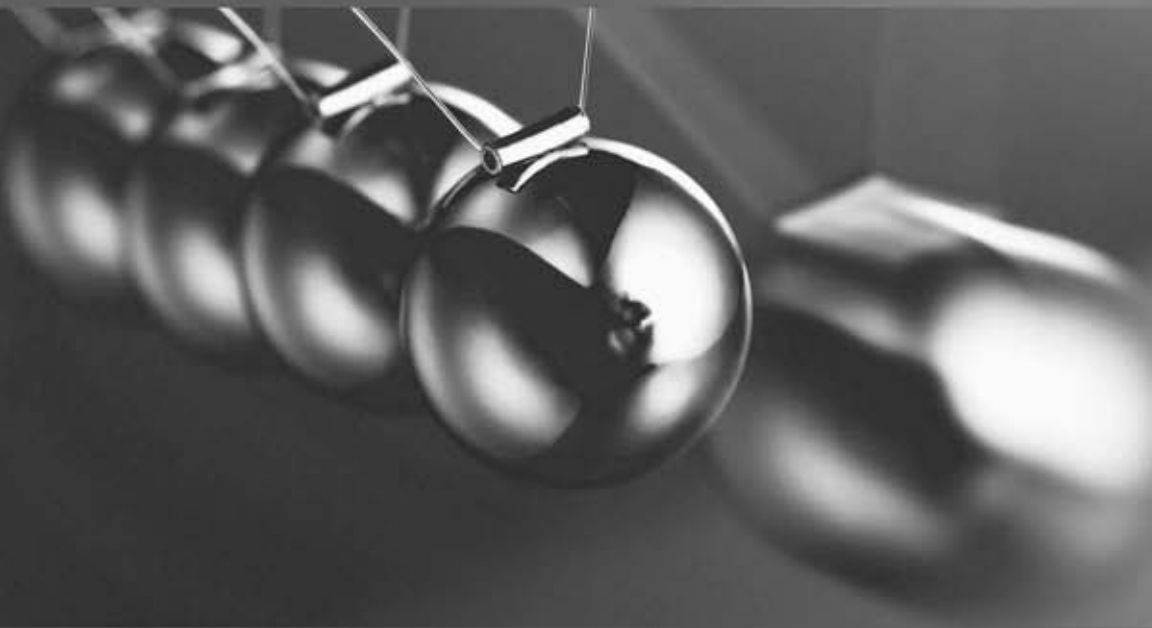
INFINITE IMPACT

The word *infinite* in the title of this book is used in its colloquial sense, meaning “without end” or “timeless.” In theological parlance, the term is, of course, reserved exclusively for Deity. In this sense, God alone is absolute and infinite, without limit of any kind. As used in the title of this book, *infinite* is intended to describe the impact of an individual life outside the normal considerations of its beginning and ending in time. In this sense, the impact of a single life is indefinitely vast and extensive because of God’s gracious invitation to join him in eternal, never-ending life. Therefore, what we do here and now echoes in eternity.



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I N F I N I T E



I M P A C T

Making the Most of Your Place on God's Timeline

STU WEBER

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SOMEWHERE AROUND THE TIME of that Harvard winter, I dreamed I was staying in a hotel. I had a wonderful room where all was well with me and I was at peace. Then I left the hotel for some reason, and when I returned, I tried to get the same room back again except that I did not know where it was in the hotel. If it had a number, I didn't remember it. The man at the desk said he knew exactly the room I meant. He said all I had to do was ask for it by name. Then he told me the name. He said the name of the room where I had been at peace was Remember.

I think of all the things you and I could remember that would not bring us peace at all, but I believe that at least part of what the dream meant was that way beyond all those things, at the innermost heart, at the farthest reach, of our remembering, there is peace. The secret place of the Most High is there. Eden is there, the still waters, the green pastures. Home is there.¹

—FREDERICK BUECHNER



INTRODUCTION
THE TIMELINE

Gollum thought he had the poor little hobbit cornered. After a series of unfortunate turns in his great adventure, the formerly respectable Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End had arrived at the worst turn of all.

Miles under the roots of the Misty Mountains, deep in the entrails of an inky black cavern, standing on the shore of a vast subterranean lake, these two now-familiar characters of J. R. R. Tolkien were engaged in a high-stakes riddle contest. If Bilbo stumped Gollum, the hobbit was free to go, and Gollum would be obliged to show him the way out of the goblin-infested tunnel system. But if Gollum stumped Bilbo, the lost little adventurer would be invited to dinner—as the main course.

And Gollum was *very* hungry.

The pair jousted back and forth for some time, and the riddles became increasingly difficult. Finally, Gollum unleashed one of his best riddles, and poor Bilbo, conscious of his hungry opponent's slavering anticipation, was at his wit's end.

This thing all things devours:
 Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
 Gnaws iron, bites steel;
 Grinds hard stones to meal;
 Slays king, ruins town,
 And beats high mountain down.¹

Totally flummoxed by this puzzler, and with growing panic gripping his throat, Bilbo could see Gollum's eyes—two pale green points—approaching in the dark. With his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, it was all the little hobbit could do to squeak out, “Time! Time!”

What he wanted, of course, was more time to solve the riddle. But by pure luck, “time” was the *answer* to the riddle, and Gollum's dinner plans were dashed.

The truth is, time has always been a riddle—to which many have sought an answer. Philosophers through the ages have grappled with the concept of time.

What is it?

Does it actually exist?

Is it an invention of the human mind?

What are its properties?

Did it have a beginning?

Will it have an end?

Is there a past, present, and future—or only an eternal now?

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a philosopher named Immanuel Kant suggested a subtle relationship between time and the human mind. He theorized that the mind structures our perceptions so that we know instinctively that time is like a mathematical line.

A line.

A *timeline*.

Maybe that's the best our finite minds can come up with to answer the ancient riddle. *Time is a line between two fixed points*. All of human history—in fact, the history of our planet—is inscribed on a single line with a definite beginning and a predetermined end. Augustine called it a one-way journey from Genesis to Judgment.

Time is not some abstract notion, of interest only to philosophers, physicists, and hobbits; you, too—if you are reading these words—have a vested interest in time.

This isn't philosophy, this is *life*, and your life is on the line. Simply because you exist, you are inseparably linked to the timeline. And so am I.

At the end of last year, I happened to catch a network sports special—one of those sports year-in-review programs that crop up in December. In one segment of the program, they showed clip after clip after clip of sports legends who had died during the past year. The piece seemed to go on and on. I was amazed that there were so many prominent athletes who had died during the past twelve months. Face after familiar face flashed across the screen, with brief action highlights of their sports exploits. Some had died in their seventies or eighties, and some had not yet reached their prime. Yankee pitcher Cory Lidle, for instance, had slammed his private plane into a fifty-story apartment building in Manhattan and had perished at the age of thirty-four.

Here were men and women, old and young, famous and forgotten, from across the sports spectrum, who had played various sports in various

eras of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Although they couldn't have known it, they all had one thing in common.

Their timelines all ended in a single year.

And so it was for an unlikely trio—C. S. Lewis, John F. Kennedy, and Aldous Huxley—who all stepped off the timeline on the very same day, November 22, 1963.

My stretch of the timeline began on June 30, 1945, and only God himself knows when it will end. At times, I thought I knew the answer; at times, it looked as if my timeline had played out and was about to end—far too early, from my perspective. But I'm still here.

Not long ago, my friend and fellow minister Gary Beikirch and I looked back and realized that our timelines had nearly ended during the same two-week period in 1970.



We were young then, and soldiers, as the saying goes. We didn't know it at the time, but a single two-week window—on the far side of the earth—would become a pivotal point in both of our lives.

We both thought we were going to die. And Gary almost did. But what began with the brain-rattling, heart-shocking horror of combat became the start of a journey to a new way of life for both of us. *The way.*

We were both Green Berets in our twenties, each stationed at a special forces camp in the Central Highlands of the Republic of Vietnam.

At the time Gary Beikirch served as a medic, attached to the A-Team at Dak Seang, A-245, I was the 5th Group intel operations officer attached, at the time, to Dak Pek, A-242. The two little jungle outposts stood astride the infiltration routes in the tri-border region where Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia come together, just a couple of miles from the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail. The two camps were only a few “clicks,” or kilometers, apart, and what happened in or around one of them had a way of coming down on the other as well.

What we didn't know at midnight on April 1, 1970, would com-

pletely overwhelm us in the next few days. Two full regiments of the North Vietnamese Army, the 28th and 66th, had chosen our two Special Forces outposts as their next meal.

And that's when everything began to change.

I remember crouching in a muddy ditch as the onslaught began, pinned down and knowing full well that our positions could shortly be overrun. It could be only a matter of time, and everyone felt it.

Newly married and twenty-five years young, I remember thinking, *So this is it. This is the end of the line for me. How sad. I've hardly had a chance to live.*

Some distance away, at Dak Seang in the wee hours of April 1, Gary was thinking similar thoughts as the NVA attacked his little outpost with everything in their arsenal. Ripped out of his bunker by scores of incoming explosions, Gary grabbed some M3 medic kits and raced across the exposed slope toward the fighting positions. It was his responsibility to keep his A-Team and their Montagnard allies patched up medically so they could continue to fight. Love for one's fellow soldiers may be the deepest of loves. Facing death together produces a camaraderie that defies description.

Within the first fifteen minutes, every American on the scene was hit at least once. Soon the NVA were inside the wire; mortar fire impacted everywhere, and small arms fire intersected across the camp. Hit by shrapnel, Gary noticed his blood dripping before he sensed any pain. No time to fuss with it, though; people were dying around him. His training kicked in. Gary hugged one Montagnard out of shock, covering the man's sucking chest wounds. Amid the flying bullets, he dragged another wounded trooper to the relative safety of a bunker.

The concussion and shrapnel from an impacting mortar round kicked Gary in the back like a mule. He flew through the air and landed more than fifteen feet away. He remembers thinking at the time, *Hey, there's a Purple Heart. . . . This is it. I'm going to die right now.*

Hit again in the back, Gary's bruised spine left him temporarily without the use of his legs.

His fellow soldiers urged him to stay in the medical bunker because

he couldn't walk, but Gary couldn't stay; his friends needed him. He talked his two faithful Montagnard assistants into carrying him. He remembers desperate hand-to-hand combat, continually treating wounds, and pulling men to safer places. Finally, with his uniform in shreds and his body bleeding from multiple wounds, Gary had to be dragged from the field himself. But he insisted on being carried *toward* the action, not away from it. If his timeline was about to end, and it seemed most likely it would, he wanted to die *in* the fight, with his fellow soldiers, not lying in some bunker.

As he tells it, to really live, you must almost die. For those who fight for it, life has a flavor that the protected will likely never know.

The next few hours and days on Gary's timeline tumble into a foggy blend in his mind. Years after the war, he likened the experience to dozens of isolated incidents imprinted on individual cards in a full deck. At times, the whole deck gets shuffled and dealt; at other times, it feels like fifty-two card pickup—the stream of events scattering rapidly from incident to incident, dodging their way around obstacles and explosions.

Amid the fog of war and the confusion of combat that day, soldier after soldier, friend and foe alike, stepped off the end of their timelines. By all rights, Gary's timeline should have ended that day as well. But it didn't. The Lord of time and eternity still had plans for Gary's life.

Over at Dak Pek, A-242, I, too, contemplated the end of my timeline. What had shortly before seemed a life of promise and prospect suddenly raveled and curled right in front of me, like a ribbon in a match flame.

But it wasn't my time, either. I came through that tight place, as I have come through others in the years since. I have learned to affirm, as King David did, "I trust in you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands."²

My portion of the timeline is in God's hands, as is yours. He marked its beginning, and he knows the precise second it will end. However long our lifespans—whether we die young or attain the years of Methuselah—we know that in comparison with human history, our lines aren't very long at all. If all of history were a mile, our segments

would be little more than an inch—or maybe two. And what we choose to do with those two inches of the timeline shapes our destiny and the interlocking destinies of many, many other people.

THE MYSTERY OF TIME

Time is a mystery (as the esteemed Mr. Baggins learned, to his great discomfiture). We acknowledge it, speak of it, recognize that we are in it, organize our lives around it, and sense that we are swept along through the days and months and years of our lives by its current. But no one really understands what it's all about.

Albert Einstein, whose own two inches of the timeline began in 1879 and ended in 1955, opened entire new vistas in the ways we think about time. But far from answering the riddle, he added layer upon layer of additional mystery as he postulated transcendental links between time, energy, and matter.

Einstein didn't solve the puzzle; he plunged us further into its depths. A riddle, wrapped up in a mystery, inside an enigma, to borrow Winston Churchill's famous phrase. We acknowledge the complexity, but we cannot unravel it. Solomon affirmed that God "has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."³

The secrets of time belong to the one who created it, who set its limits and boundaries, and who has always existed above and outside of it. How does one explain that to the philosophers? The apostle Paul took a shot at it when he stood before the leading intellectual lights of Athens and declared, "From one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; *and he determined the times set for them* and the exact places where they should live."⁴

I especially like the words of Jesus on the subject of time: "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this *very little thing*, why do you worry about the rest?"⁵

Isn't that good? Adding an hour to our lives—or a day or a year—

is a “very little thing” to the Lord of time. He can do whatever he pleases with time—even *stop* it, as he did in answer to the direct prayer of one of his handpicked warriors (see Joshua 10:12-14).

Joshua didn’t understand the physics of stopping the sun over Gibeon and the moon over the Valley of Aijalon for an extra twenty-four hours; he just knew he had a big job to do and an even bigger God who could do *anything*. So what’s the problem?

No, we’ll never be able to unravel all the mysteries of time. But we can gain wisdom in how we *use* time. That’s what Moses is getting at in Psalm 90 when he prays, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”⁶ Paul writes, “This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up.”⁷

The truth is, we can use time to our advantage. I’m not talking about “time management,” but rather *time perspective*. We can learn how the timeline works and create a better future because of it. The Bible fairly brims with this kind of counsel, and the Holy Spirit will be our willing teacher.

In our culture of instant messaging and nanosecond-long searches of the entire World Wide Web, our perspective of time has been altered. But time itself hasn’t changed. And neither has our progression along the timeline. When it comes to our own two inches of the timeline, we may be down to our last half inch, or we may just be getting started. Who can say? All I know is that if I’m down to my last half inch, I want it to be the finest, most joyous, most productive half inch of my life. How about you?

From his vantage point above and beyond the timeline, God has a perfect perspective on where we’ve been, where we are, and where, by his grace, we’re going. I long to have God’s perspective, don’t you? Let’s seek it together in the pages that follow.



1

PURPOSE AND POWER

If you accept the idea that we live out our earthly lives on a timeline, then this very moment—*right now*—is already part of the past. I hope you enjoyed it, because it's already gone by. You're further down the line than when you began this paragraph.

One philosopher pictured the passing succession of life's moments like a sizzling stick of dynamite, declaring, "The essence of nowness runs like fire along the fuse of time."

Ssssssssssssssssssssssssssst! Look out. There it goes!

How fast is the fuse burning? C. S. Lewis described the future as

“something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.”¹

Yes, it may seem as if time has slowed to a crawl as you sit passively in a chair or propped up in bed reading this book, but at this very moment your timeline is *on fire*—racing down the seconds, minutes, and hours toward its inevitable conclusion.

Before the advent of dynamite fuses, thoughtful men and women sought to capture the fleeting nature of time with other metaphors. Plato observed, “It is as if we were floating on a river, carried by the current past the manifold of events which is spread out timelessly on the bank.” The apostle James was perhaps sitting by a river on a misty morning when he wrote, “You’re nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing.”²

That’s a picture of the brevity of life as a whole, but it’s also a snapshot of this very moment in time: a bit of fog, a flash of sun, and it’s gone.

A melancholy thought? Well, yes and no. That’s just the nature of things. We all know that life is racing by. Many of us are reminded anew every time we look in the mirror. But because we serve a God who is at once beyond time and outside of time, we can have confidence that the significance of our lives—in God’s hands, according to his power and his sovereignty—can soar beyond all comprehension.

Peter reminds us: “Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”³ In other words, a thousand years passing can register in heaven like the passing of the sun across the sky, from sunrise to sunset. *But it also means that a single day in God’s hands can have a thousand years’ worth of significance.* Little is much when God is in it, and every moment counts. God may not freeze-frame the sun and moon for us as he did for Joshua, but he can achieve precisely the same effect by expanding the reach and impact of each hour and moment of our lives.

But what of the moments gone by? What of the seasons we have already lived? Are they lost to us? It depends on our perspective. No, we cannot live them again, as much as we might like to (or shudder at the

prospect). But remember, God is the Lord of our *entire* timelines. At the same “moment” he hovers over our present, he also walks in our past and goes before us into our futures. As David writes, “You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.”⁴

In this present moment, I walk with God step-by-step, enjoying his companionship. He has told me in no uncertain terms that the future is his concern, and although I may plan, dream, and prepare as best I can, I am not to worry (see Matthew 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–31). And my past?

Ah . . . glorious truth!

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.⁵

“Come now, let’s settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.”⁶

God has wiped the slate clean of all our sin, blotting out all our betrayals and failures and selfish preoccupations, taking it all upon himself, releasing us from its penalty, and crying out on the cross to men, angels, and devils, “*Telestoi!*” *It is finished!*

Yes, he has taken away our sins, but he has not taken away the past. And though he will protect us from reliving the guilt and shame and regret of poorly invested days, he also has much to teach us from the past as we walk out the remaining quarter inches of our timelines. God possesses our past, just as he possesses our present and our future. In fact, if we do some looking back under his guidance, we will see things we’ve never seen before, truths that may directly apply to our present and our future.

Far from being a loss to us, the past seasons of our lives are often the means of our deliverance in the present and the very preparation we need to face the future. If you find yourself locked up, shut down, and

paralyzed from taking action, the answer to the riddle may very well lie in your past.

What am I suggesting? Just this: I believe that God has left life-transforming secrets on the trail *behind* us. Your back trail—or mine. If you've ever read a Western by Louis L'Amour, you know that when his heroes traverse an unfamiliar stretch of wilderness, they will frequently stop their horses, turn around in the saddle, and study the trail behind them. Why? Because the land they just passed through doesn't look the

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same when viewed from the opposite direction. And if they ever have to find their way back, the terrain will seem unfamiliar unless they've seen the lay of the land, looking the other way.

It's the same with our lives. When the Holy Spirit shows us our back trails, we'll find landmarks and vistas we never even glanced at the first time through. The landscape appears different when we're looking back from the present.

I believe that God leaves treasure on our back trails.

GEMS IN THE DUST

A friend of mine recently shared a childhood memory of playing with his cousins out in an old apple orchard in southern Oregon. The boys were scuttling around in the dust when the eldest cousin suddenly bent down and picked up a twenty-dollar gold piece. Can you imagine that? How long had that gold coin been lying there, awaiting discovery? Very possibly since those gnarly old apple trees were seedlings.

What would it be like to find a gold coin or some precious stones along the path of life? A ruby, glinting blood red in the sun. A perfectly cut sapphire, blue fire flashing out of every facet. A five-carat diamond, catching daylight and throwing it back in a rainbow prism. Why should such things surprise us? We are sons and daughters of the Great King, Loving Father that he is, he wants us to live well. And no matter what

you might think of your past life, the God who loves you has scattered priceless jewels of wisdom along the path *behind* you. Yes, there may be some bitterly unhappy memories back there and some dark passages you would rather forget. But what has God been doing while you've been living your life forward? He has gone behind you, and he has left treasure in the dust.

So, even if the past seems like just a bunch of dust in your memory, look for the gems. *You can apply the power of nurtured memories to shape your future.* I'm talking about the healthy sorting of memories—culling, and then discarding, the warped impact of the negative past; rediscovering, and then focusing on, the positive elements that have made you who you are.

“EVERYONE WHO GOT
WHERE HE IS HAD TO
BEGIN WHERE HE WAS.”

— ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Yes, we've all had negative experiences in the past. The question is whether we will allow those negatives to permanently eclipse our positive heritage. By reflecting on the positives, we can bless and redeem the past. By reclaiming our positive memories, strewn as they are in the dust of the timeline behind us, we can recapture their power to strengthen us for the timeline yet ahead.

I learned this lesson—or I should say was reminded of it—in the company of a three-year-old.



My grandson and I had spent the entire day together. Oh, it was a great adventure, and now we had come to the best part: Poppa and his buddy curled up on the couch together to watch a movie—and loving every wonderful minute of it. On this occasion, we'd just finished off the evening meal with a chocolate-covered ice cream bar. We licked our fingers, smacked our lips, and headed for the main feature: Disney's animated classic *The Lion King*.

As we settled into the couch, I noticed that my little buddy seemed to crowd especially close to my side and nestle under my arm. I said, “This must be a pretty scary movie, huh, buddy?”

All of a sudden a new personality emerged. His eyes lit up and doubled in size. His voice took on a sense of determined focus, and his hands and arms gestured with all the intensity a three-year-old can muster.

“Scar is a baaaaad lion!” He paused for a moment and then added, “And I’m gonna get my shaawtguun and shoot him when he shows up.”

He scrambled for the ever-present pile of toys, looking for whatever it was he called his “shaawtguun.” Unable to find anything that resembled one, he settled for a plastic golf club. The movie began.

You know the story. The kingdom around Pride Rock, ruled by the benevolent Mufasa, is blessed with abundant grass, sparkling streams, and healthy animals. The music is sweet. All is well. But Scar, the usurper, carries out his evil plot and murders Mufasa. Then he rid the kingdom of the young heir to the throne, Simba, by shaming him into believing that Mufasa’s death was the young cub’s fault. Believing himself to be a guilty prodigal, Simba wanders hopelessly into the far reaches of the wilderness.

And it gets worse. Scar’s wicked tyranny systematically sucks the life out of the pridelands, and the kingdom devolves into misery. The once beautiful landscape is reduced to ashes. The water stagnates, the grass disappears, evil triumphs, and depression reigns.

And then . . . Simba comes to his senses. The entire story turns on a single scene, a scene that centers on just one word, one of the most powerful words in our language.

Remember.

On a starlit evening, Simba finds himself beside a pool of water. A refreshing pool of reflection and recollection. The pool of memory becomes something of an altar of remembrance, and the real Simba begins to emerge. Now full grown, but still in exile in the wilderness, the young lion has been encouraged by his childhood friend Nala to return and restore the kingdom to its former glory. But Simba refuses to return. Wallowing in the deep disappointment of his own past and its false guilt, he seems hopelessly lost.

In his disorientation, all he can do is stare into the pool at his own

reflection. And then, in his reflection, he sees something larger than himself. Behind and above him, the pool reflects the stars sparkling in the dark. Voices from the past whisper on the wind, the familiar voices of the great lion kings of the past, repeatedly intoning one simple message to the young lion:

Remember who you are . . .

Remember who you are . . .

Remember . . .

Deeply moved, Simba begins to awaken to reality. He remembers who he is. He is Mufasa's cub, his father's son, heir to the throne. He begins to shed the dark side of his disappointing past and sees the brighter side of events that have shaped him. Starting, however hesitantly, to see the noble side of his father in himself, he hears his father's voice call out, "You have forgotten who you are, because you have forgotten me."

What is happening to Simba? It is the very same process that many of us need to experience.

At the pool of memory, Simba begins to realize that he is not just part of a meaningless animal herd wandering in a wilderness of forgetfulness. He has an identity. He is part of something larger than himself, standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before. A mantle has been passed to him, a just and righteous mantle.

Remembering transforms him from the inside out. Memory takes hold, and character emerges as the direction becomes clear. Simba resolves to return to Pride Rock and take back both his life and his rightful place. After defeating the tyrant Scar, he rebuilds the kingdom and restores the environment. The music is sweet again. All is well, and all because he *remembered*.

Frederick Buechner, one of my favorite writers, helps us to sort our memories when he writes, "I am inclined to believe that God's chief purpose in giving us memory is to enable us to go back in time so that if we didn't play those roles right

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— FREDERICK BUECHNER

the first time round, we can still have another go at it now. . . . Through the power that memory gives us of thinking, feeling, imagining our way back through time we can . . . [remove the power of the past] to hurt us and other people.”⁷

Not only can we heal the wounds of the past, but we can harness the strengthening nature of the past to our own good and the good of those around us. By remembering, we can reform. By reflecting, we can bless the past. By reclaiming our positive memories, we can inherit their power to strengthen us for the future.

Memory is the lifeblood of character and identity. Forgetfulness is destructive. Remembering who we are is one of the most important things we can do as human beings.

THE YELLOW FORMICA TABLE

For Simba, it was a reflecting pool. For me, it was a yellow Formica table.

As I sat on the couch with my grandson as the closing credits rolled on the screen, my mind drifted toward my own past. The movie may have been over, but the impact of the evening on me was not. As my little grandson drowsed against my side, my mind scrolled through a recollection of my own—a memory more than half a century old.

When I was a little boy, I, too, spent a special day with my grandpa, William Weber. That day was also something of a great adventure, and it, too, had included the finest of desserts after dinner—one of my grandpa’s famous ice cream and Pepsi floats.

Fifty years ago, there was no *Lion King*. In fact, there was no home video. Before television had become popular enough to start eroding the foundations of family life in America, my grandparents practiced an evening ritual of playing table games. As it turned out, that particular night, with a simple table game for our entertainment, would leave a permanent mark on my memory and my life. It was a memory that would also shape my future, because nearly twenty years later, the simple recollection of that night would save my career.

It's a story I've told many times, but I offer no apologies for repeating it here. *Life-shaping memories are made to be told and retold.*

Grandpa and Grandma and I were seated in the kitchen nook, at the old, yellow Formica table, playing Parcheesi. To my frustration, I had fallen well behind in the game, and I was becoming desperate. The last thing a scruffy little boy would ever want to do is lose to his own grandma. So I cheated. And I got caught.

The game stopped. So did the chatter. My grandma turned her eyes to my grandpa, and the mood in the kitchen

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turned very serious. I felt my face getting hot. Grandpa dropped his glasses down to the tip of his nose, and he looked directly into my eyes. "Stu," he said, "you're a Weber boy. And Weber boys don't lie, cheat, or steal."

I loved my grandpa, and I knew he loved me. His blue eyes sparkled, even into his eighties. He was a practical, straightforward man, and he taught me how to work with purpose. He was also a fun-loving man who taught me to laugh. I would never have intentionally disappointed him.

That night, he gave me something to live up to. I was on my way to becoming a cheater, but Grandpa gave me a vision for a better future. I had to decide. What kind of boy would I be? What kind of man would I become? Would I be a person of integrity, or would I drift, along with much of humanity, into a swamp of dishonesty, shading the truth, cutting corners, and trimming the facts to suit the needs of the moment?

On that unforgettable night in my childhood, that kitchen nook became something of a temple, a holy place. And the old Formica table became an altar. At the time, I certainly didn't understand all its momentous ramifications—mostly I just felt bad—but that evening became for me a life-governing memory. Twenty years later, when a superior officer in the Army directed me to falsify a report, I refused to lie. That night at the Formica table flashed through my mind, and I remembered my grandpa's words: "Weber boys don't lie, cheat, or steal."

Later, quite apart from any initiative on my part, the inevitable investigation (which deception always breeds) was launched. Not only was my own name clean, but the senior commander actually commended me.

Thanks, Grandpa. You gave me a vision for what I could be and a memory that shaped my future. *Nurtured memories serve as the baseline of our destinies.*

When my grandparents passed away, I was fortunate enough to come into possession of their yellow Formica table. That table is much more than something to hold food off the floor. It is a symbol of something much larger. Around that table, in our own little kitchen, Linda and I raised our three boys. Today, our youngest son and his wife have it in their possession. Together they're raising three more little Weber boys (as of this writing).

That humble little table, not much to look at in itself, has become something of a monument in our family. Think of it. Five generations have eaten at that table. Five generations have forged their characters and enjoyed each other's company around that simple piece of furniture. It has marked the timeline of everyone in the family.

THE STUFF OF LIFE

Memories are the stuff of which life is made. That's true personally, in a family, and in a nation. Elie Wiesel said it well: "Memory feeds a culture, nourishes hope, and makes a human, human."

Much like Simba, you and I have some pain to discard and some memories to nourish. For that to happen, we all need what Simba so desperately needed: reminders.

That's what this book is about. It's an opportunity to seek from the Lord of the timeline the invaluable gift he gives better than anyone else: perspective on our lives. As we walk through these pages together, I think you'll be encouraged to blow away like chaff those memories that would hold you back. I also believe you'll grab hold of the good seed, the healthy, life-bearing seed that is able to produce a family tree that will flourish for generations to come.

What we need are reminders that speak to us of who we really are, of what God has done for us, and of what our ultimate destinies will be. God in his grace, has, still does, and will continue to provide us with reminders—if only we will open our eyes, our ears, and most importantly, our hearts.

This we must do . . . for our own timelines and for the greater timeline that envelops us all.

YOUR JOURNEY ON THE TIMELINE

Impact Statement: Purpose and power flow from uncovering positive memories.

SUMMARY

- The young lion overcame his disorientation at the pool of remembrance.
- Memory is the lifeblood of character. Nurtured memories serve as the baseline of our destinies.
- The pool of reflection is a place for the healthy sorting of memories. It is learning from, culling, and then discarding the negative elements of our past. It is rediscovering the positive elements of who we are. It is harnessing our character for maximum impact.
- Life-shaping memories are made to be told and retold for our own good and for the benefit of others.
- Simple things, like Formica tables, can become monuments in our souls.
- Without a clear remembrance of the past, there is not a proper context for the present or the future.
- Memory loss destroys people, families, and nations.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. When was the last time you took a half day or more and sat beside your own pool of reflection? Will you resolve to do it soon?

2. Can you identify two or three negative memories you will choose to cull from your developing character?
3. Can you name, from your past, a person or two who has left a soul-shaping impact on you?
4. If you were to tell one story from your past, what would it be? Why?

MOVING FORWARD

Pick a day in the near future. Set it aside for yourself and your reflection. Write down one or two of the key positive memories of your past that continue to mark you to this day (even if it's just a paragraph or two).

NOTES

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2. James 4:14, THE MESSAGE
3. 2 Peter 3:8, NIV
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stu Weber graduated from Wheaton College and holds advanced degrees from Western Seminary. A U.S. Army veteran, he was awarded three bronze stars as a Green Beret in Vietnam. It was there, in the trauma and uncertainty of war, that Stu committed himself to a lifetime of vocational ministry. Stu is a pastor who loves his family, his country, and Christ's church.

More than thirty years ago, Stu and his wife, Linda, joined a small group of friends in founding Good Shepherd Community Church, a thriving Oregon church family, where they still worship and serve.

Stu is the author of a number of best-selling books, including *Tender Warrior*, *All the King's Men*, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*, and *Spirit Warriors*. He has also written the Matthew volume in the Holman New Testament Commentary series.

Stu and Linda live near Portland, Oregon, where they greatly enjoy their three grown sons, three wonderful "daughters-in-love," and seven grandchildren.